he asserted that he was the possessor of a formula that would enable others to postpone old age as he had done; and he insisted that his valet, as impudent a knave as Germain himself, was a living testimonial to its virtue.

In this connection the story is told that, at a dinner party one evening, when detailing a conversation he declared he had had in Palestine with King Richard the Crusader, whom he described as an intimate friend of his, Germain noticed unmistakable signs of amusement and disbelief on the faces of some of his auditors. He turned at once to his valet, who was standing behind his chair, and asked him if what he had been saying was not the truth.

"Why, sir," was the quick reply, "I really cannot say. You forget that I have been only five hundred years in your service."

"Ah, yes," said Germain, "I remember now; it was a little before your time."

The wits of the day, particularly Voltaire, poked all manner of fun at him, and denounced his pretensions with savage ridicule. But this did not prevent King Louis and his mistress, the Pompadour, from taking him quite seriously, especially as he was introduced to court by the Maréchal de Belle-Isle, who had purchased a dose of his elixir and vouched for its remarkable qualities. His apartments were besieged by people of all ranks—"those fools of Parisians," as he ungratefully alluded to them in a conversation with Baron de Gleichen—willing to pay any price for the death-defying formula. Altogether, Germain led a pleasant, prosperous and luxurious life until, perhaps realizing that he could not keep up the imposture forever, he one day abruptly departed from Paris. Nothing further is known of him, except that he died many years later at the palace of another royal disciple of occultism, the Prince of Hesse Cassel.

IT remained for the France of the post-Revolution period to be afflicted with the ruler whose superstitious tendencies brought more misery both to his own country and to Europe at large than did ever the vagaries of any Bourbon king. This was Napoleon Bonaparte. No illiterate peasant believed more firmly in signs and omens than did this mighty conqueror. He could see a portent in anything. Once, to cite a typical instance, when he was impatiently awaiting news from Egypt, he heard that a French vessel had run ashore in the Nile and that its crew had been put to death. The name of the vessel was L'Italie. Immediately he declared that he now knew his dream of annexing Italy to France would not come true. No amount of argument could persuade him to the contrary. "My presentiments never deceive me," said he. "All is ruined. I am satisfied that my conquest is lost." In this case at any rate subsequent events most assuredly justified the "omen."

More important from the historical point of view, however, was his singular belief that he had a "guiding star," and that under it he could confidently proceed from victory to victory. There were times when he actually imagined that he saw this star, even in the middle of the day. In 1811, when Cardinal Fesch was imploring him to desist from his futile warfare, Napoleon led him to a window, opened it, and asked:

"Do you see that star?"

"No, sire," replied the astonished cardinal.

"Look again."

"Sire, there is no star visible," insisted the cardinal.

"But I see it," said Napoleon brusquely, and walked away, quite as though he had adduced some weighty and unanswerable argument against the appeal for peace.

Similarly, General Rapp, long his aide-de-camp, happened to enter Napoleon's study one day, without taking the formality of having himself announced. He found him gazing intently out of a window, so absorbed that he did not notice Rapp's presence until the latter purposely made some noise. Turning, Napoleon excitedly seized him by the arm, and, pointing to the sky, said:

"Look there, up there."

Rapp looked, but said he saw nothing out of the ordinary.

"What!" exclaimed Napoleon. "You do not see it? Is it possible that you do not see my star? It is before you now, and ah, how brilliant!"

And, growing still more excited, he added:

"It has never abandoned me. I see it on all great occasions. It commands me to go forward, and it is a constant sign of my good fortune."

A sign also, he might have added, of the misfortune of millions of other people. Unquestionably, some of the blackest pages in the annals of the nations of Europe would never have been written if Bonaparte had been a trifle less superstitious.

So, again, a scant half century later, superstition bulked large in the make-up of another Napoleon, though with far less disastrous consequences. Napoleon III, indeed, posed as a man of the utmost common sense, but was singularly influenced by the noted medium, Daniel Dunglas Home. Emperor William of Germany, then prince regent of Prussia, the queen of Holland, the king of Bavaria and Alexander II of Russia, also had frequent sittings with him. The last named, in particular, was so overwhelmed by what he saw and heard that, like Napoleon, he accepted Home's claims at their face value. In doing so, however, he was only true to the traditions of the royal house of Russia, for almost all the czars from the time of Ivan the Terrible have had in them a streak of occultism, frequently to their subjects' woe. Had it not been for this the sorely needed reformation of the governmental and economic systems of Russia might have been accomplished a hundred years ago, when Alexander I instituted the liberal policies which he consistently maintained until he came under the reactionary influence of the mystic Madame de Krudener.

THE present czar has been similarly handicapped by the traditional superstitiousness of the Romanofs. The peasant Rasputin, his back-stairs adviser of today, is but one of several occultists who have in turn been influential in determining his conduct. Perhaps the most mischievous of all was a Frenchman, Philippe Landard, who, ten years ago, obtained such control over him that he was assigned private apartments in close proximity to those of Nicholas in every palace where the Czar chanced to be staying, and was daily consulted on the most important of state problems as well as the most trivial of personal affairs.

Things finally came to such a pass that the entire cabinet threatened to resign if he were not dismissed from court. Outwardly Nicholas yielded, but secretly he continued to listen to Landard's counsels until, on the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war, the Frenchman rashly indulged in a number of prophecies that were sadly belied by the actual outcome of the war. After this he fell from favor, and one day was given forty-eight hours in which to get out of Russia.

All of which, of course, looked at superficially, is extremely amusing. But when we remember the bloody struggles that so often have been precipitated, the bitter persecutions so often set on foot, and above all the blighting influence exercised by the royal example on the minds of the general populace, the extent to which superstition has prevailed among the rulers of mankind must be accounted one of the most deplorable facts in the history of the world.